

Session Eight

**Children and Family: How  
Can They Understand**



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**Session Eight****Children and Family: How Can They Understand?**

The NDEP strongly encourages inviting a medical person (health care provider or certified diabetes educator) to participate in any sessions that you conduct to provide support for the discussion and to answer any specific medical questions that may arise.

**Background**

Many people are afraid to burden their family with their fears or medical concerns. Often people make assumptions that children won't be able to understand, and that it is better to protect them from information about health problems. Some people assume that family members won't be willing or able to make lifestyle changes that would be better for the person with diabetes—better, in fact, for everyone in the family.

**Objectives**

1. To discuss what emotional expectations people have from their families.
2. To describe how Calvin deals with sharing information about his diabetes, and about his fears, with his family.
3. To discuss the role that family can play in making major decisions about health and lifestyle.



***Time needed for discussion: 45 to 60 minutes.***

**Materials**

- DVD of the film *The Debilitator*.
- DVD player/TV monitor.

For instructions on borrowing *The Debilitator* film, see page 4 of this guide.

The handout *Effects of Diabetes* can be found at the end of this session (after page 64).

- Handout: Web page *Effects of Diabetes* (a copy of the Web page is included in this discussion guide kit; make at least one copy for each participant).
- Optional: Flipchart or blackboard for writing down key words from discussion.

## Method

- Conduct a facilitated discussion (group discussion with a leader asking stimulation questions).
- Play the film, or select scenes from the film as needed.



DVD

1. **Tell the group:** Think about the opening scene in the film at the funeral and about Calvin's son Bobby. *[You may want to replay the scene from the film to refresh participants' memories.]*

**Consider using the following questions to guide the discussion:**

- **Ask:** Does anyone remember what Bobby says to his father as Calvin is lying in the coffin?

*Response:*

- Calvin's son says to him at the funeral, "Why did you have to die?"

- **Ask:** What emotions is Bobby feeling?

**Make sure that the discussion identifies the following emotions that Bobby is experiencing:**

- Loss.
- Fear ("What are we going to do now?").
- Confusion, and maybe resentment or anger ("Why did you have to die?").
- Others?

- **Ask:** What do you think children understand about death, and what can they handle?





***Make sure that the discussion brings out the following points:***

- It depends on the age of the child. A six-year-old may have “magical (unrealistic) thinking,” in which he believes that his father may come back to life. A 10-year-old has a better understanding of death as being permanent.
- Children at any age, and even adults, can believe that they are somehow at fault for the person’s death. They may feel guilty for something that they did or said or thought, even if it has no relationship to the actual cause of death.



DVD

2. **Tell the group:** Think about the scene in which Calvin calls his family together and says, “I don’t want to scare you, but I do want to talk to you all about it [diabetes].” *[You may want to replay the scene in the film before beginning this discussion.]*

3. **Ask:**

- How did you feel when Calvin talks to his family about his dream?
- Do you think that having this conversation will help Calvin live with diabetes?
- What do you think of the approach Calvin chooses? Can you imagine having this conversation with your family? Why or why not?



***Make sure that the discussion brings out the following points:***

- You can hurt yourself or your family members by not talking to them about diabetes because you are afraid that the information may scare them.
- Sometimes just talking about something may not seem as if it would do much good, but getting something off your chest can be a huge relief.

- It is hard to live with diabetes if you are carrying around the knowledge of your condition as a big secret or a big burden in your heart without sharing it.

#### 4. **Ask:**

- Do you think that people you know would share this kind of emotional information with their families, their spouses, and their children?
- Do you think that there are any risks or things to consider when talking to family members about serious health topics that may affect you?



#### ***Make sure that the discussion brings out the following points:***

- An important way to follow up with your children is to make sure that they are OK emotionally after you have told them about your diabetes. Ask them later what they thought about the conversation, what they think caused the diabetes, and what they think is going to happen to you. Children may have unvoiced fears of their own that they need to express.
- In the film, Calvin's son Bobby asks, "Dad, does this mean we can't play football and basketball anymore?" The family may be concerned that a person with diabetes has to be protected from exertion. They may misunderstand what is helpful and healthful and what is not.
- In the film, Calvin's daughter asked him, "Didn't you have a blood glucose test a few months ago?" Family members may not feel that the subject that you are bringing up is news because they don't realize how your attitude toward your diabetes has changed. Calvin could have responded, "Yes, but I didn't take it seriously then, and now I do."



DVD

5. **Tell the group:** Think now about the scene in which Beverly Goodson has a conversation with her mother. *[You may choose to replay this scene before the discussion.]*
6. **Ask:** What emotions do you think are coming into play in this scene?

*Examples may include the following emotions:*

- Denial. Beverly's mother keeps changing the subject, saying, "Oh baby, let's talk about you."
- Fatalism. People may have the feeling that there is nothing a person can do to prevent diabetes complications. Beverly's mother says, "I just want to see you married with children before I die." At some level she is afraid, and she is worried about her diabetes, but she also feels that her situation is in the hands of fate and is not under her control.
- Anxiety. People may push away responsibility for their own health because they are focused on taking care of others. Mrs. Goodson says, "I'm not worried about me; I'm worried about you." How often does this situation come up in your family? How can this situation work against a person with diabetes?
- Frustration. Beverly Goodson tells her mother that this year at medical school has been very hard because everything she learns about diabetes makes her think of her mother. But Beverly sounds very frustrated when she says this. What can she do to turn her frustrated concern into helpful action? Perhaps she can take one or more of the following actions:
  - Bring the subject up again later when her mother is calmer.
  - Write her mother a note telling her again why she is worried and saying that she loves her and wants to help.

- Suggest at least one practical thing that the two of them can do (for example, go to a doctor's appointment together).

7. **Ask:** Do you ever have conversations like this in your family? What do you do that is helpful or not helpful?



## Homework Exercise

Distribute copies of the Web page *Effects of Diabetes*. Ask participants to choose among the following optional activities based on the ages of the children in their families (who may be grandchildren or nieces and nephews), the kinds of activities that they like to do with friends and family members, and the kind of support system that they have.

- Check out the Web site [http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/human\\_body.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/human_body.htm) with your family or friends. (If you don't have a computer at home or at work, your public library has computers that you can use, and the staff will show you how to find this Web site.) Click on the human figure to find out more about how diabetes can affect different parts of the body and what you can do to prevent complications.
- Find the following items on the Internet: free music that you can download and move to, such as *Movimiento Por Su Vida* on the Web site <http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/ndep>, or the many free materials that you can order from the Web site <http://www.ndep.nih.gov>. (If using the Internet is new to you, have the library support staff, your children, or a computer-knowledgeable friend show you how.) The Web site <http://www.diabetesatwork.org> has lesson plans and information on managing diabetes while at work. The point of this activity is not just to get educational materials—it is also to get your family involved in learning more and talking more about diabetes.
- Visit the American Diabetes Association (ADA) Web site and check out the "Family Resource Network" that connects families dealing with diabetes with each other: <http://www.diabetes.org/for-parents-and-kids/living-with-diabetes/family-resource-network.jsp>.





## Handout for Session Eight

# Effects of Diabetes

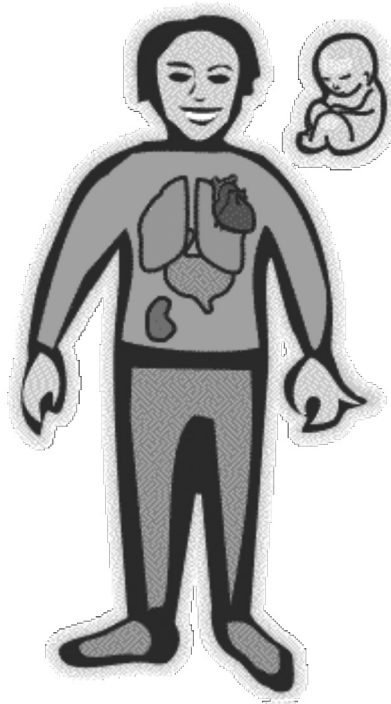
Here's a sample from the Web site

[http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/human\\_body.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/human_body.htm)

**Hi, I'm Frank**

### Effects of Diabetes

Diabetes can affect any part on your body. The good news is that you can prevent most of these problems by keeping your blood glucose (blood sugar) under control, eating healthy, being more physically active, and working with your health care provider to keep your blood pressure and cholesterol under control and getting necessary screening tests. Click on the figure at right to learn more about how diabetes can affect your body—remember: you can prevent these complications.



**Visit these Web sites for more information:**

<http://www.ndep.nih.gov>

<http://www.diabetesatwork.org/lessons.htm>

<http://www.diabetes.org/for-parents-and-kids/living-with-diabetes/family-resource-network.jsp>

<http://www.diabetes.org>

<http://www.dhss.mo.gov/diabetes>

